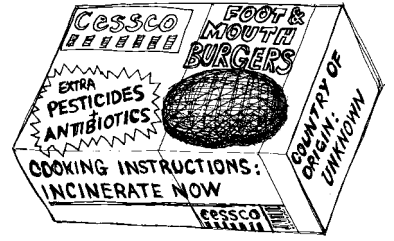




WAKE UP! WAKE UP! IT'S YER BURNIN' ISSUE

SchNEWS

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SHOPPING MAUL

"If you have local food and local shops, things may go wrong but they don't spread like this" – Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy, Thames Valley University.

In case you haven't noticed the foot and mouth disease outbreak has spread right across the country. Hardly surprising as livestock is routinely transported all around the UK, Europe and beyond. Let's face it Britain's agriculture is a mess: BSE, genetically modified foods, pesticide residues and now foot and mouth. So what's gone wrong?

In 1939 13% of the population worked on farms, now its only 2%. Today's food production has more in common with an industrial production line. Each year 860 million farm animals are slaughtered, the vast majority of these reared intensively in overcrowded conditions, leading to the rapid spread of disease and the routine use of antibiotics.

The production of fruit and veg isn't much different, crops are grown in huge monoculture plots and routinely sprayed with pesticides: e.g. lettuces are sprayed 15 times. Considering that England is an ideal climate for growing apples it's crazy that we now consume more French ones than English!

Supermarkets' Sweep Up

"Outside economic forces have done me in. You have no control over prices, everything is set by outsiders. It doesn't matter how well you farm, it just gets harder and harder" - Ex-farmer

The big four supermarkets sell over half our food in the UK. This dominance gives them a stranglehold on producers. Supermarkets know that farmers have little choice and dictate which varieties should be produced, how animals should be kept, and what chemicals need to be sprayed, and when. In return for their efforts farmers receive minimum prices for their products. A survey found that apples were being sold at nearly double the price that farmers were getting for them, and eggs four times as much. And if the produce isn't uniform in size, shape and colour farmers have to throw the food away and get nothing.

Tescos are now trying to have only three suppliers for each of their products. So if you're a farm that gets a contract you can grow and grow (well unless you fall out of favour cos' your tomatoes aren't juicy enough), if not, then hard luck. And despite the increasing supermarkets claims to support British farmers the amount we

import from abroad is increasing, and even food that is British probably isn't local - in the last 20 years the average distance our food travels within the UK has doubled (SchNEWS 283).

So if farmers are getting shafted by supermarkets why aren't they protesting about this rather than the price of fuel? Well they did. In 1998, enraged by the fall in the amount they received for their meat, they blockaded ports and supermarkets. The action forced the government to carry out an investigation, but the Office of Fair Trading couldn't see that the supermarkets were doing anything wrong, so nothing changed. A recent survey by the National Farmers Union found that 98% of farmers believe that their futures would be more secure if they went back to basics and selling direct to the public. But most are too scared to speak out, in case they lose their 'contracts' i.e. livelihood and home.

* British supermarkets are roughly three times more profitable than similar companies in France, Germany, Italy and Spain.

* Last year Sainsbury's made a meagre £580 million pre tax profits and Tesco's an embarrassing £955 million- how do they cope?

* Lord Sainsbury, the former Chief Executive of Sainsbury's, is the richest man in Britain, and a Labour peer.

Superpowers

Supermarkets may have destroyed our farming industry, but they've given us convenience, choice, jobs and cheap goods. But hey, wait a minute lets look at how convenient and how much choice they really offer us. Call us old-fashioned but how convenient is it to get to an out of town shopping centre, rather than pop to your local shop (especially if you've got no car). When supermarkets move into an area small shops go down the pan. A government report in 1998 concluded that food shops in market towns lost between 13 and 50% of their trade when a supermarket opened. In 1950 there were 221,662 food shops in Britain by 1997 this had fallen to just under 37,000. Is that what they call more choice?

What about job creation? Well, supermarkets employ one-fifth of the staff per unit area than smaller shops, and how can working in a supermarket compare to working in a local store? But at least the supermarkets are cheap, aren't they? It may come as a surprise but they're not. Although they

CRAPARREST OF THE WEEK

For handing out a leaflet! The Canadian police are getting a bit twitchy in the build up to the Summit of the Americas, which takes place in Quebec in April. To show off their intolerance, they arrested 3 people for handing out leaflets criticising the police plan to erect a 5-kilometre security perimeter around the conference centre. Sounds more like Qatar than Quebec to us. After a newspaper picked up on the story an embarrassing climb down followed, the city apologising to those arrested. Quebec has recently passed an anti-scarf by-law as a "security measure" for the Summit. Anyone even partially covering their face with a scarf faces arrest.

tempt you in with cheap bread and baked beans, loads of their other stuff is more expensive. Independent specialist shops have been found to be 30 percent cheaper than the big chains, and if you buy direct from your local farmer or farmers' markets then the savings are even greater.

Despite all this the popularity of supermarkets appears to be growing and it may feel like there's nothing we can do to stop them. Their growth may be due to lazy-car driver-shove-it-in-the-microwave mentality. But they've also curried favour with politicians, influencing policy so that they can build what they want where they want, even in National Parks. Supermarkets also bribe councils with roads and community centres in return for building their stores. In Brighton, Sainsbury's look set to be allowed to build next to the station despite everybody wishing they would get lost. In return they are willing to bribe the council with building a road.

SchNEWS' ALTERNATIVES

So what can you do to undermine the supermarkets' dominance? Simple, don't shop at 'em if you can help it.

* Go to your local market or greengrocer, you may be surprised at how cheap they are. Try to find out if there's a farmers market in the area, where farmers sell their own produce direct. 01225-787914 www.farmermarkets.net

* Grow your own food. Get a list of allotment sites from your local authority or squat a bit of unused land! Alternatively you can join a City Farm, details from The Federation of City Farms www.farmgarden.org.uk

* Campaign against more supermarkets. BUDD (Brighton Urban Design and Development) are opposing Sainsbury's development at Brighton station. 01273-681166, www.solarcity.co.uk/BUDD

* To find out more about supermarkets' power within the government and other dodgy things, read George Monbiot's book, Captive State, published by MacMillan.

ZAPPED

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) from the Mexican state of Chiapas, who have inspired the worldwide anti-capitalist movement (see SchNEWS 250) are currently on a march to Mexico City. Their aim is to persuade the new government to adopt the San Andres peace accords, which were agreed in 1996 but never implemented. They're visiting 36 towns on the way to the Capital. On 11th March there will be a huge rally and they'll meet with federal legislators. The 24 delegates are unarmed and they include most of the key military commanders of the EZLN, including their charismatic media figurehead, Marcos.
*Chiapas Link, Box 79, Green Leaf, Bristol, BS1 5BB. <http://chiapas.indymedia.org>
*There will be a Peoples' Global Action European meeting in Milan, Italy, 24-25 March, Leoncavallo Social Centre. If people want to get in touch asap with yabasta@tin.it.

The Last Straw

Within a fortnight of the Terrorism Act becoming law Home Secretary Jack Straw has announced 21 organisations banned under the Act for targeting foreign states. These include the Kurdish Workers Party, ETA the Basque separatist group and the Tamil Tigers.

Straw said the groups were all "concerned with terrorism." This wide-ranging definition would have no doubt included those in the UK supporting Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress a few years back.

* Despite the bombing of Iraq last week nearly every Iraqi Kurd applying for asylum in Britain is being refused as the government says the region is now a "safe" area! Er, wasn't one of the reasons for bombing Baghdad last week to prevent Saddam attacking the Kurds? Not to mention around 10,000 Turkish soldiers in northern Iraq terrorising the local population and eight million landmines spread across the area. Sounds safe to us. To protest about this Kurdish asylum seekers are currently mounting an indefinite hunger strike outside Parliament Square. For more details call 020-72545033 or 07941-566183 or e-mail info@defend-asylum.org.

* There is a demonstration outside Oakington Detention Centre on Saturday 10 March to mark the first anniversary of the opening of the refugee prison. Assemble 12:30pm Parker's Piece, Cambridge City Centre. 01223 700644. E-mail: dtb23@cam.ac.uk

Summit For Nothing

Quebec City in Canada has the 'honour' of hosting the Summit of the Americas on the 20th-22nd April, bringing together 34 heads of state. "The Summit of the Americas is in many ways a pre-packaged media spectacle in a controlled atmosphere of gala dinners, cocktail parties and photo opps. Thousands of delegates and media reps are to attend the gathering, as well as thousands of police in what will be the largest security and police operation in Canadian history." The summit's major goal is putting the final touches on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) agreement which aims to establish a "free trade" zone that would extend NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement - see SchNEWS 200) to the tip of South America. As usual the purpose of this 'free trade' area is to allow corporations to profiteer by getting rid of what they see as barriers to trade - silly little things like environmental regulations, unionised workplaces, restrictions on child labour etc.

* Mass demonstrations are promised www.quebec2001.net

* FTAA "Campaign of Inquiry" Packet. Details from www.tradewatch.org/FTAA/ftaahome

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SchNEWS in brief

Buskers, street entertainers and circus performers are asked to gather at noon, Abbey Courtyard, Bath, 16th March to demonstrate against the impending loss of this traditional busking pitch on common land to private restaurant space. flangewrangler@hotmail.com
** A warehouse in California containing **GM cotton seed** has been torched destroying all the seed in it. www.earthliberationfront.com
** Meeting of **ROSA** (Reform the Official Secrets Act), 6pm, March 6th, upstairs at Lucas Arms, 245 Grays Inn Rd, WC1, London. www.officialsecretsact.org
** **Hackney** will be on strike again next Wednesday (7) to co-incide with the setting of the council budget. An alliance of Tory and Labour councillors plan increases in rents and council tax while cutting jobs and services and privatising others. There's pickets of council workplaces from 7am, rally on the town hall steps 11.30am, and mass rally against the budget cuts, Hackney Town Hall 6pm.
** **Students at Sussex Uni** were at it again this week, when around 30 occupied the finance offices to protest about the 100 students who are threatened with expulsion for non-payment of fees, and that Sussex is considering charging top-up fees as well. Within half an hour there were over 30 cops, and 50 private security surrounding the buildings. The occupiers came out about 7.30pm. e-mail sussexfreeeducation@hotmail.com
** There will be a picket outside **GlaxoSmithKline**, Great West Rd., Brentford, TW8 (Syon Lane train station) on Monday 5th. It's the day that Glaxo and 39 other corporations are taking the South African government to court for having the cheek to try and make cheap drugs for AIDS victims (see SchNEWS 290). On the same day there will be a funeral procession at 11:30 am outside South Africa House, Trafalgar Square, London. If possible, wear a red AIDS ribbon and dress in black. www.actsa.org
** Want to kick-start a campaign against climate change in your area? Then why not get in touch with the Rising Tide who are going on tour in May and June. Call 0161-2738516 (by 10th March) or email climatechaos@yahoo.com. Climate change talks will be resumed July 16-27 in Bonn, Germany.
** For anyone in Brighton interested in getting involved in **anti-GM food** action there is a meeting upstairs at the Branch Tavern, London Road, 7.30pm, 8 March. ** Schwoops! The phone number for the week of anti-GM actions (5-10 March) is 0161-2266814; we got the code wrong last week.

Mortar Combat

A Safety Summit at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference on Tuesday was a get together of construction bosses, MP's, the Health and Safety Executive and trade unions, it was a typical New Labour hot air exercise. A demo was called by the Construction Worker's Union and the London Hazards Centre. The day before construction workers downed tools and marched in London while wheeling 129 hard hats made into a mountain to symbolise the number of deaths in the last two years. The day of the conference started with a vigil at 7am growing into a noisy demo, 150 strong, by lunchtime. A banner advertising the "Safety Summit" claimed to be "Turning Concern into Action" but as Margeret Jones (the aunt of Simon Jones who was killed at work - SchNEWS 182) said, "New Labour won't change anything until they stop sucking up to the fat cats". Adding "the banner should have read "Talking Bollocks and Doing Nothing". London Hazards Centre 020-77945999.

REBEL ALLIANCE

Tuesday March 13 at the Hanover Community Centre, Southover St, 7.30 pm *sharp* Join your hosts 'The Hagettes' girls to find out the latest news and views from direct action groups in the Bright Town. Served up with tasty tucker and top tunes... Children welcome. Bring yer own beer.

Inside SchNEWS

Garfield Marcus Gabbard needs your letters of support. He is currently residing at HMP Pentonville awaiting sentence for his part in the N30 demo outside Euston train station and is expecting 7 years for setting fire to the police van that was parked outside. Life is pretty hard in Pentonville with 24 hour lock up - apart from to collect food - one shower a week max, no hot water in the cells and screws beating prisoners on a daily basis. So getting post is the highlight of the day, a vital contact with friends outside. Garfield also had to go on hunger strike for nine days so he could get vegan food, even though he is a member of the Vegan Society. Garth desperately needs people to write letters of support, and as he says, "The ones who got away with their actions or worse helped the filth should remember the ones who kept their gobs shut on arrest. As for me I was offered money and the dropping of charges to finger others, but as I've got my morals they can stuff their idea of turning me into a grass". One of the reasons Garfield was arrested in the first place was because at the demo somebody pulled his mask off leading him to be photographed by the cops. This in itself is a lesson to us all - no matter how you feel about violence at demos never ever try to take anybody's mask off - you could be getting someone a long prison sentence. Write to Garfield Marcus Gabbard D5-08. FT9062 HMP Pentonville, Caledonian Road, London. N7 8TT

RIP

*Dolly Watson died peacefully two weeks ago a few months from her 100th birthday. Dolly became embroiled in the No M11 Link Road campaign after she refused to leave her home where she was born that was due for demolition to build the road. Her home was in Claremont Road, which became the scene of the first mass direct action in an urban area against road building in 1994. She said of the protesters "If I was queen, you'd all be knighted."

*SchNEWS sends its sympathies to family and friends of Roz Jones who tragically died two weeks ago. Amongst other things Roz was one of the well-known faces around the UK festie scene, part of the techno tart posse who'd come up with gems like the Glam'R' Us 'flirtation tank'. If you knew Roz and want to show your respects paste a message up on www.sixpics.com. There will be wake/party for Roz this Friday evening (2) at the Button Factory, Hardess St off Herne Hill Rd. (Brixton tube).

*Easter Sunday is the third anniversary of Sorted Dave's death on the route of the Birmingham Northern Relief Road. Friends are asked to come along for a bit of bailiff baiting/ church service at the Greenwood Site.

...and finally...

Historic moments of the 20th Century.

* Battle of the Somme - 120,000 British and French went over the top.

* D-Day 175,000 landed on the beaches

* Velvet Revolution, Czechoslovakia. 300,000 march through Prague.

* Berlin Wall over a million help to get rid of The Wall

* Countryside Alliance 120,000 gather in Hyde Park.

Spot the odd one out? Well not if your part of the Countryside Alliance's PR Dept who reckon their march (with suspect figures) is up there with the rest.

Historical? More like hysterical.

* If you don't reckon the Countryside Alliance are such a great idea then get in touch with the Urban Alliance, Tel 07946 687192 www.geocities.com/urbanalliance/

disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all food industrialists we're having a swill time with our pens meeting up for a Sunday joint, a Monday joint, Tues, Wed